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SUBJECT: EU FOREIGN MINISTERS MEET (GAERC) TO DISCUSS AFGHANISTAN,
IRAN, SOUTHERN CAUCASUS, AND MORE

REF: Stockholm 577

Sensitive but Unclassified. Please handle accordingly.

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: EU Foreign Ministers (FMs) met in Brussels on September 14-15 as the General Affairs and External Relations Council (GAERC) to review EU foreign policy priority areas. Discussions in the External Affairs Council centered on Iran, Afghanistan, and the Southern Caucasus, with the Council adopting conclusions on Sudan and Honduras, and renewing the mission statement for the EU Security Mission to the Democratic Republic of Congo (EUSEC RD Congo). Discussions in the General Affairs Council reviewed progress reports on energy infrastructure development, as well as crisis mechanisms relating to the security of energy supplies. The Council also discussed preparations for the upcoming European Council meeting on October 29-30, the agenda for which will include institutional issues (implementation of the Lisbon Treaty, if appropriate), climate change, the economic crisis, a Baltic Sea strategy, illegal immigration and developments in external relations. The Council also approved European Commission (EC) reports on progress made in Bulgaria and Romania under the Cooperation and Verification Mechanism, while noting that there is far more work to be done by both.

¶2. (SBU) The press conference following the GAERC noted the upcoming "5+1" talks with Iran on October 1, and called for internationalund at <http://g> more sanQ he saw as the Q implement further EU sanction unilateralt from Iran wQs "not a very concrete one;" however, he noted 4hat Iran is "at least prepared to talk." Bildt said that he did not expect any solution could be negotiated quickly. In addition to then should address other issues as well, alluding to the political and human rights situation.

¶5. (SBU) AFGHANISTAN ELECTION: Following their informal "Gymnich" meeting in Sweden September 4-5 (Reftel), the foreign ministers continued their discussions and reaffirmed their support for "the Gymnich roadmap." Ministers voiced support for the U.N. Mission and for Kai Eide's efforts, and noted that the ongoing election verification process will be lengthy and must be handled "in a credible way." At the press conference, Olli Rehn, Commissioner for European Enlargement, said that stabilizing the economic and political situation in Afghanistan represents an enormous challenge, and that the EU urged the international community to be patient in order to allow the two election commissions (i.e., the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC), and the Electoral Complaints Commission (ECC)) to complete their work without external pressure. Rehn also paid tribute to Member of the European Parliament Philippe Morillon, who was acting as the head of the EU's Electoral Observation Mission.

¶6. (SBU) In response to press queries, Bildt acknowledged that the Afghan electoral process was taking a "long time," and that everyone knew there would be complexities. He noted that more polling

stations were open and running than originally expected, and that numerous complaints of fraud and irregularities have been filed. Bildt expressed EU support for both commissions' efforts, emphasizing that the future of Afghanistan will be determined "by the success or failure of a legitimate political process."

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¶17. (SBU) SOUTHERN CAUCASUS: Ministers recognized that the EU has the most important role to help contribute to the stability of the region, and unanimously endorsed a Presidency proposal that the Commission prepare mandates for negotiations on Association Agreements with Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan. At the press conference, in response to a question about the attitude of Russia toward the EU's rapprochement with the region, Bildt replied that these are sovereign countries which have the right to choose their own future, without restrictions imposed "by anyone else." Asked about the timing for the negotiating mandates, Enlargement Commissioner Rehn said the Commission would prepare the mandates in November. (Note: Council Secretariat staff subsequently clarified that working out the mandates will take time and that they did not expect them to be launched until 2010. End Note) FM Bildt also said that ministers welcomed the positive developments in relations between Turkey and Armenia.

¶18. (SBU) CROATIA-SLOVENIAN DISPUTE: In response to press questions about recent developments between Croatia and Slovenia, and about the timing of resumed accession negotiations with Croatia, Bildt said the date would be determined soon. Both Bildt and Rehn welcomed the deal agreed between the two PMs, and were optimistic that the new confidence would be reflected in the "domestic decisions" to be taken by the two countries (a reference to the role of national parliaments in Croatia and Slovenia).

¶19. (U) OLLI REHN'S INTEREST IN HIGH REP SOLANA'S JOB: In response to a press question, Rehn said it was "premature" to discuss this matter, and that it was essential to ensure "the Lisbon ratification process is accomplished first." He then added that he enjoyed working in the Commission and hoped to continue in an EU job in the future.

GENERAL AFFAIRS COUNCIL

¶10. (U) Chaired by Cecilia Malmstrom, Swedish Minister for EU Affairs, the General Affairs Council reviewed the draft agenda and preparations for the European Council meeting scheduled for October 29-30, and addressed the work achieved on energy infrastructures and interconnections, as well as on crisis mechanisms relating to the security of energy supplies. The agenda of issues to be addressed in October by the European Council includes institutional issues (a currently empty heading that will cover many of the key political issues that would be unblocked by a positive Irish referendum on the Lisbon Treaty), climate change, the economic situation, a Baltic Sea Strategy, illegal immigration, and external relations, depending on recent developments.

¶11. (U) G-20 SUMMIT PREPARATIONS: The Council was briefed by the Swedish Presidency on arrangements for an informal meeting of EU heads of state on September 17 in Brussels, in preparation for the G-20 Summit meeting September 24-25 in Pittsburgh. The European Council's conclusions on the G-20 Summit can be found at European Council Conclusions on G-20 Summit (http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_Data/docs/pressdata/en/ec/110166.pdf).

¶12. (U) BULGARIA AND ROMANIA: The Council adopted conclusions which welcomed the EC's reports of progress made in both Bulgaria and Romania under the EC's Cooperation and Verification mechanism, noting the "good level" of cooperation by both member state governments. The Council conclusion called on both nations to intensify their efforts in the fight against corruption, and to demonstrate "tangible and lasting results" (especially in establishing impartial, independent judiciary systems with effective resources) in order to enable EU policies to function properly.

¶13. (U) UNION FOR THE MEDITERRANEAN - WOMEN IN SOCIETY: The Council

approved EU guidelines for a second Union for the Mediterranean ministerial meeting on the theme of "Strengthening the Role of Women in Society," which will take place in Morocco on November 11-12.

14(U) ENERGY: The Council tightened up its legislation overseeing national oil stock mechanisms by adopting a directive that requires member states to maintain minimum stocks of oil or petroleum products. This directive is intended to ensure that there is enough available oil in the event of a future crisis. Member states will have to ensure that by December 31, 2012, total oil stocks maintained at all times within the EU should correspond at least to 90 days of average daily net imports, or 61 days of average daily inland consumption, whichever is greater.

¶15. (U) EU-INDIA Nuclear Energy Cooperation Agreement: The Council adopted a decision authorizing the Commission to open negotiations on a cooperation agreement between the European Atomic Energy Community (EURATOM) and India for research and training dealing with the peaceful uses of nuclear energy.

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¶16. (U) ENVIRONMENT (Ship-source Pollution): The Council adopted a directive strengthening EU rules on ship-source pollution aimed at improving maritime safety and enhancing protection of the environment by making discharges of polluting substances a criminal offense "if committed with intent, recklessly or with serious negligence." Member states will have a year to transpose the directive into national law.

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